

# SUZUKI PIANO BASICS FOUNDATION NEWS

Volume 3.5, September/October 1998

To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka.

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## TEACHING THE *TWINKLE* VARIATIONS

**Notes condensed by Karen Hagberg from two lectures by  
Dr. Haruko in Sacramento, California, August 1998**

***Twinkles will decide the future of the child.*** Learning to play the *Twinkle Variations* perfectly can solve all our problems. I say this every year, but teachers do not yet really understand.

The *Twinkle Variations* embody literally all of the basics of piano playing. People think that piano is easy--that we do not have to create our own sound, but just touch the keys of the instrument. But precisely **because** it is easy to make a sound on the piano, it is therefore difficult to make a **musical** sound. Everyone thinks that just any sound on a piano is a musical sound, but we must always choose the best, musical sound when we play. Practice listening for a musical sound. When you go to a concert, listen to see if the performer makes a third-class or a first-class sound.

When you begin to teach *Twinkle*, you must teach how to produce a musical sound. We do this by making such a sound ourselves for the student to hear.

Patiently teach a correct ready position over each note before you ask for any sound at all. Have the students practice this patiently with the help of the parent. If you begin this way, the student's arm will never drop when he or she begins to play.

In the beginning, ask for a soft sound. If asked to play loud, a small child will get stiff.

Children are wonderful and intuitively understand what is going on around them. They are right-brained, in other words. Intuition decreases as we age. Our knowledge blocks the intuition. So please give children a very good sound to play. Because they do not have knowledge of what is good and what is bad, they simply copy the teacher's sound, no matter what that sound may be.

Sometimes I see teachers and children moving their fingers, because I always ask for moving fingers, but they are making a bad sound. **Always** close your eyes and listen for the best sound. Make three different sounds and choose the best of the three. Teachers do not choose the best sound when they play their own lessons. Why is this? We must pay attention and realize how difficult it is to play a musical sound on a piano. We always have to concentrate on this. We must become like wind players, who listen to themselves better than other musicians because it is more difficult to produce a good sound on winds than on other instruments.

In the beginning, students sometimes produce very poor sound. The teacher must sometimes take several months, patiently teaching how to make a musical sound.

The worst mistake comes at the point when the child can finally play all the notes of the *Twinkle Variations*. Being able to play the notes does not mean that the child can play the piece! It is at this point that the child may begin to study the piece. The goal is for the student to play just like the recording. Each week I ask a little more from the student in the *Twinkle Variations*. When I add the accompaniment, the concentration needs to be re-taught. **Always** they need to be practicing one note at a time, with the parent saying "Ready" and then "Go."

Whenever students play any part of Book 1 for me, I can hear the weaknesses that result from poor preparation on the *Twinkle Variations*. The level of our satisfaction with how the students play is presently **way too low**. We have to raise our expectation on every piece.

I had a transfer student who came to me playing the *Gigue* in Book 4. I spent over a year with her just on this piece. I did this because I had faith that she could learn to play well.

If a young child can play the notes of a difficult piece, but plays poorly, and we praise the child, this is doing a great disservice to the student. It assumes that he or she cannot do better.

If you see a child with poor manners, you should correct the child and not just look down on him or her. Poor manners are not the fault of the child. Children **want** to know what is right.

The mothers of other students around the transfer student I mentioned above wondered if the student weren't bored playing one piece for over a year. But the child's mother understood and answered that they were given so much practice at every lesson that they could not think about doing anything else.

Begin by believing that a child can play at a very high level, and that the child can do other things well too... cleaning their room, for example. If a parent does not have a high standard and does not insist on it, the child's level will remain low. Teaching means to **insist** on details.

### ***To do good work, we need patience, health (a natural body), effort, concentration, and love.***

Really to praise children means to have confidence in their ability, not by making complimentary remarks. Dr. Suzuki never praised children with complimentary remarks. He was always ready to bring children to the next level. He would say, "*You studied hard,*" but never, "*Your performance was great.*" He was a very strict teacher. Sometimes when I feel I'm being too strict about details of performance, I may praise something unrelated, such as their clothing, hair, etc., but never look down on a child's ability. Children who are 4-5 years old can play as well as I can. Reach for more by demanding more from the *Twinkle Variations*.

I have recently begun teaching my own granddaughter. I give her a lesson on the *Twinkle Variations* every single week, paying attention to each little detail. Now, after two years, she can play them quite well.

Children are tough. They can practice for two hours at a time. Do not spoil them in Books 1 & 2 or they will not have the skill to play well in the upper books.

In teaching any piece, the most important thing is the posture. Being above the keyboard means not just the hands, but the entire forearm above the keys. When in this position, the hand may hang down in a relaxed and natural way and can do anything.

Practice this position after saying, "Ready." Let the student study body balance at this time. *Ready-Go* is not just a mechanical exercise. It is a way to acquire body balance and concentration.

To do good work, we need patience, health ( a natural body) effort, concentration, and love. As we teach, we need to set our sights on these five things. We have love for the children, but we need to assign hard practice that they will not like to do.

Under the age of ten, children need help from their parents and they must listen to them. As they grow up, they gradually begin to become independent from parents and do not listen to them so much anymore. This is why it is so important to teach them when they are very young.

Teaching the *Twinkle Variations* using *Ready-Go* can be very boring unless we teach students and parents why they are doing it. They need to know this. Think about all the things that students need to learn, and each week explain the importance of good practice from various angles: for example, 1) to stay above the keys, 2) to learn to move the thumb sideways, 3) to produce good tone, etc. The *Twinkle Variations* are the most difficult pieces in Book 1. They must be taught at every lesson. Always raise the level of performance by asking for a new thing once a previous point has been learned. Even 3-year-olds can play the *Twinkle Variations* well if they have good body balance. They can play even better than the recording.

I assign practice on the *Twinkle Variations* every week, but nobody complains that it is boring because I explain the importance of doing it every single week as well. My son complained because his daughter falls asleep while she practices the *Twinkle Variations*, so I told him not to practice when she is too tired. Then he admitted that he was the one falling asleep and blamed it on the piece! My granddaughter does not practice too much because her parents both work outside the home. Sometimes she must practice at 10 p.m. But because of diligent work on the *Twinkle Variations*, she can play Book 1 with solid technique.

Students in Book 1 should be able to play every piece they have studied. A teacher who teaches Book 1 well is a good teacher. If a student can play Book 1 well, he or she can play anything. In Matsumoto, all the students have learned to hold their forearms above the keyboard. Once teachers decide this is important, it can be taught. Even when families are too busy to practice at home, the basic skill may be taught at lessons. Many teachers are now getting close to having their students truly above the keyboard. At this point, we are talking about the final 1/2 inch or so.

If you practice walking on a tightrope, there may be variations in style, but getting your balance is the most important skill to learn first. This is achieved with the best posture. We have been made to carry ourselves this way on this earth.

I recently saw a documentary about the people who live in Zimbabwe. It showed a place with ancient ruins and a nearby village. The women of the village would walk quite a distance to fetch water from a well. They filled huge containers which they carried on their heads. Then they walked back over fields and narrow paths, smiling and talking effortlessly. When we are perfectly balanced, the weight of the body and the force up through the body from the earth makes us weightless. If these women were to carry so much water in their arms it would be too difficult.

Playing the piano with good balance means that we do not have to use any extra effort or force to play. Some people may think that I ask for too straight a back, but if the head goes forward we lose balance. This puts a strain on the third vertebrae. If the head shakes, the back has to do such heavy work. The body must be natural and flexible, like the body of a dancer.

Piano is a difficult instrument because we have the job of playing the whole orchestra's parts. We must play accompaniment and sing out the melody at the same time: two different jobs within the same

rhythm. Teachers need to study hard so that students have a good model. Please come to Matsumoto and study these things!

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## **THE MATSUMOTO 10-PIANO CONCERT**

### **MAY 2, 1999**

The American teachers and students who will attend the Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert will leave for Japan on Saturday, April 17 to arrive in Japan on Sunday, April 18. They will leave Matsumoto on Tuesday, May 4.

**Any teachers planning to attend the concert should contact Karen Hagberg immediately for further details.**

**Final deadline for registration is October 30, 1998.**

Karen Hagberg, 8 Prince Street, Rochester, NY 14607  
Phone: (716)244-0490; Fax: (716)244-3542; e-mail: hagberg-drake@juno.com

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### ***Thank You, Dr. Kataoka!***

***From Louisville, KY***  
***By Bruce Boiney***

This June, Dr. Kataoka taught for one week at the University of Louisville Summer Institute and then for two days in my studio. The highlight of the week for most of the participants was the chance to have a lesson with Dr. Kataoka. Her great ability to see to the heart of the student (not to mention the hearts of the parent and teacher!) and pinpoint the exact issue that needed to be addressed was very evident.

By being in the presence of Dr. Kataoka's amazing sound and concentrated energy, I became more aware again of how good the music we teach can really sound.

I am continually grateful that Dr. Kataoka is willing to make the long trip to America time and again to help keep us going in the right direction. It's at times like this that I hope to teach in a way that rewards Dr. Kataoka and Dr. Suzuki a little bit for their faithful work, too.

***From Atlanta, GA***  
***By Bob Brammer***

The workshop this year was very focused on the preparation of students for Graduation and Friendship Recitals. Kataoka Sensei's assignments to the students specifically addressed how to practice for the concerts. The success of her teaching was evident in the improvement of the students between the lesson and the performance. This was very inspiring and informative to the teachers. The Teacher Recital also gave the participating teachers a chance to remember what it feels like to perform in a concert hall. This also helped provide insight into how to prepare students. Thanks, Kataoka Sensei for a great week!

***From Rochester, NY***  
***By Karen Hagberg***

Perhaps the best way to describe our appreciation for Dr. Kataoka's help this summer is to list the ways that the local Piano Basics teachers have changed as a result of this summer's visit. Research on Alberti bass has become a focus of our own practice and research so that we may properly demonstrate it for students. We have resolved to teach the Twinkles more thoroughly at every lesson (see notes from Dr. Kataoka's lecture in Sacramento). We have begun to sit down together after joint concerts to review the students' performances on videotape down to every detail, including several aspects of stage presence. We have renewed our effort to seat students properly and to teach the best posture, which include making sure the entire forearm is above the keyboard. We have vowed not to put students on the stage to play a piece they are not ready to play (no matter how much pressure we get from the students or their parents!). And finally, we will do everything in our power to obtain the best instruments for ourselves and our students. Dr. Kataoka, as always, Thank You.

***From Sacramento***  
***By Rita Burns***

Thank you Kataoka Sensei for giving 100% to the fifty-three teachers and numerous parents and students who attended the Sacramento workshop this August. This is the ninth year that Dr. Kataoka has traveled to Sacramento to teach us. We feel blessed.

As always, Kataoka Sensei gave her all to help the children to bloom in a good environment. She respects the children and sets very high standards for them. I think children can feel how much she is for them, and how concerned she is for them to grow. As an adult, who has had many lessons with Dr. Kataoka, I can feel that she desperately wants me to both understand and to be able to play well.

We are grateful for her unremitting devotion to training us, her perseverance and patience. We look forward to her return for the first Ten-Piano Concert performed in the States. We promise to work hard to prepare our students for this concert. I know that what pleases her the most is when we and our students improve. She always seems uncomfortable when we praise her, and usually says, don't be lazy! So, I speak for all of us whose lives have been changed for the better by her influence, "We won't be lazy for the children's sake."

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**TEACHER TO TEACHER**

**BY PAM SMITH, ATLANTA, GA**

In 1982, I had the excellent opportunity to meet the world-famous pianist, Lili Kraus. I first saw her at a music club meeting in a small bed-and-breakfast inn in Celo, North Carolina. Eventually I was invited to visit with her in her home. With me were other friends, making a little circle of awe-struck admirers who could hardly believe our good luck at the invitation.

We sat as Lili held court. What struck me was how immediate she was for a woman of her age. She was quite interested in our lives and what we were about. As she went around the room, she asked each of us

about our lives and work.

I was seated at the end of the small semicircle. As the conversation drifted toward me, I realized that I would have to say that I teach piano. A cold dread overcame me and I considered lying about my profession. I couldn't imagine admitting this to such a person. What if she asked me to play? I was hoping for a fire drill to excuse me from this meeting. But ultimately, it was my turn to respond.

"*And, darling, tell me what you do,*" she insisted. "*I teach piano,*" I said, unable at the last minute to cloak my identity. She stood, unexpectedly and walked toward me. "*Oh no,*" I thought, "*Here it comes.*" As she approached, I stood.

She took my hands into hers and stroked them gently. "*Oh,*" she sighed. "*God has sent you to me. He has this message for you. When you teach, you must be very careful.*" She patterned a kind of piano technique, stroking the back of my hand with the pads of her fingers. "*Be careful how you teach. Never, ever hurt the children!*" She commanded. With her soft, seemingly boneless grasp, she held my hands for a few moments. She sighed, then released the hold and dropped back down onto the sofa.

I wondered at these strange words.

In 1969, Dr. Suzuki wrote his educational philosophy on the teaching of music to children. Oddly enough, he did not name it *Teaching Music to Children* or *The Methodology of Music Teaching*. Instead, he named his book *Nurtured by Love*. Why? Like the words of Lili Kraus, this title is unusual. The definition of '*love*' according to the dictionary is a strong, tender affection; deep devotion, as to one's child, parent, etc. And, the often quoted Biblical passage, 1 Corinthians, 13:4-7 says: "*Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail.*"

It is June of 1998 and I am eating dinner with Kataoka Sensei at the end of a teaching day during the Atlanta Piano Basics Workshop. We are discussing the lessons over a wonderful Italian dinner. Once again, she says, "*It's the teacher's fault if the student is stiff and unnatural.*" The word '*teacher*' seems underscored for my personal benefit. Early the next morning I wake early, crying tears for the students whom out of ignorance I have hurt. The ghost of Lili Kraus hovers nearby. I resolve once again to either understand how to teach piano or quit altogether. The shadow of the child within me cries, too, remembering the trust I placed in my own teacher and parents to guide me in playing the piano, which I desperately longed to do.

The resulting tension from those early piano lessons lingers in my muscles the next Tuesday as I struggle to release the first four sixteenth notes of *Twinkle A* into the natural flow of the rhythm. I understand Sensei's assignment of one hundred repetitions, so that my body can rediscover its natural beat. On Saturday, with just thirteen repetitions under my belt, I stride to the stage with more confidence than I have ever had and play the Clementi *Sonatina, Op. 36, No. 3* with more ability than I could have imagined.

The following Tuesday, a lovely seven-year old student comes for her first lesson with me, having transferred to my studio from out of town. After watching her play, it's suddenly clear and remarkably simple how to teach this child. I take her still fingers into my hands. Stroking her tiny fingers and speaking quietly, I say, "*Relax.*" I touch her shoulder lightly and next, her elbow. Then, lifting her arm... "*Take down...take up. Fifty times. That's right.*"

To all the teachers in my life who have asked me to teach the truth, I remain humbly thankful.

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*"I think, in a sense, that teaching is one step beyond performing. Teaching entails more responsibility. There is a greater obligation in teaching than in being a great and successful performer today, because if you are a performer and if you have something to say or teach that is meaningful, you will have success. However, if you're a performer, and if you can play your instrument whatever it be, marvelously, and have nothing or very little to say, I don't think you'll remain a success very long. That is something that is a one-to-one relationship between performer and public. It simply sifts itself out. However, if you're a teacher, and you pass on nonsense, then I think you commit a grave sin. Yes, in that sense, being a teacher is far more serious and responsible because it's something that is passed on to the next generation, which will itself pass it on, and so forth."* Concert pianist, Leon Fleisher, as quoted in *Clavier* magazine.

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## THE REAL PAYOFF BEHIND PRACTICING AND LISTENING

BY JANE BRASHEARS, SUZUKI PARENT, ORANGE, CA

*"I know, I know,"* bemoan our children when we tell them something for the 'millionth' time. Our children do 'know,' but how quickly they forget to live out their knowledge in daily activities. I, too, 'know' much of what Cathy Hargrave told parents and teachers during her talk at Mei Ihara's piano studio in Orange. I know that Suzuki piano lessons are more than learning how to play the piano; they help our children to develop character and life skills to help them face an increasingly challenging world. Yet how quickly I forget in the heat of a piano practicing battle or during a disappointing lesson, that the process of taking piano lessons is more important than a polished piece. So I listened intently as Cathy, a Suzuki teacher trainer and graduate of the Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto, Japan, spoke with warmth and humor. Her message was that if teachers and parents will support, challenge, motivate, and hold children accountable throughout their years of piano study the rewards will be great.

What are the benefits of piano lessons beyond the obvious one of learning how to play an instrument? The following were some mentioned by Cathy. Piano lessons promote (1) respect for self and others, (2) a sense of honesty, (3) taking responsibility for one's actions, (4) the knowledge that our actions produce consequences, (5) personal accountability, (6) the importance of learning, and (7) self-motivation.

How can we, as parents and teachers, help our children to reap these benefits? Each week parents must follow through with what the teacher has asked them to do during the lesson. Teachers, themselves, must do what they ask their students to do, practice the piano with good technique on a regular basis. Both parents and teachers need to hold children accountable. Cathy feels that adults need to tell children honestly when they aren't doing a good job and praise them when much listening and careful practicing are evident. Adults can encourage self-motivation by providing many opportunities for children to come in contact with other musicians and by always speaking positively about piano. If the adults are committed, children will learn how to play an instrument, an achievement, which promotes feelings of self-worth and allows for self-expression. After a year and a half of piano lessons my seven-year-old daughter, when asked what she could do well, proudly wrote, *"I can play the piano."*

Ms. Hargrave reminds us that *activity leads to productivity*. Our children are guaranteed to make good progress if they practice correctly and listen to their music daily. Children must practice correctly in order to progress. It is the piano teacher's job to help the child practice correctly and it's the parent's job to ask questions and have the teacher clarify any area of uncertainty. Achievement is also in direct proportion to listening. Cathy believes that listening is even more important than practicing. Children should listen to music at least three hours a day. The listening may be passive, while in the car, at home

or even during sleep and should include all kinds of good music, not just Suzuki pieces. Cathy challenged us to do something easy that we don't do as often as we should. Turn on the music!

Piano lessons are a gift that we give to our children. The gift is costly and not always appreciated. So strive to remember that years of practicing can develop, not only musical proficiency but confident, diligent and responsible human beings. Stick with it. Don't turn off the *Twinkles* when the going gets tough. After all, perhaps some of those fine qualities will rub off on us!

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## **"KATHLEEN'S OBSERVATION"**

**BY DONNA MURPHY (KATHLEEN'S MOM), OWENSBORO, KY**

My six-year-old daughter, Kathleen, and I have just begun our Suzuki piano lessons. Our lessons began with observing a Suzuki lesson of other young pianists. After having observed our first lesson, I was seated at the piano one morning playing a piece I had been working on, when Kathleen walked into the room. I realized she was in the room when I felt her hand touch the middle of my back and she said, "*Sit up to the piano, Mommy.*" I looked at her with a bit of amazement at what she'd grasped at that first observation and she added, "*Pay attention to your music.*"

*Kathleen is a student of Phyllis Newman, Owensboro, KY, and welcomes Suzuki penpals. Her address is: Kathleen Murphy, 1341 W. 15th St., Qwensboro, KY 42301 e-mail: d-murphy@juno.com*

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## **ATTENTION! ATTENTION! ATTENTION!**

### **THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL PIANO BASICS 10-PIANO CONCERT SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA AUGUST 6, 1999**

In order to focus on the 10-Piano Concert and the valuable preparation and learning which occurs in the preceding rehearsals, it has been decided that there will **NOT** be a teachers workshop with Dr. Kataoka following the 10-Piano Concert.

All teachers, new to Piano Basics or experienced, are invited to attend the two-week rehearsal period and concert. This is an invaluable learning/study period that you will not want to miss!

Teachers wishing to have students perform in the 10-Piano Concert should consult the guidelines in our May/June issue and contact Linda Nakagawa by phone, fax, or e-mail with their preliminary plans by

**October 15, 1998.**

Please be prepared to give the approximate number of students attending from your area as well as the piece you wish to perform.

**Send the approximate number of students and proposed piece to  
Linda Nakagawa, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento, Ca 95831  
Phone/Fax: (916) 422-2952  
email: Ignak@quiknet.com**

**By October 15, 1998**

**FINAL DEADLINE: DECEMBER 10, 1998**

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## **FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD**

**With this issue you will receive the 1998-99 Membership Directory.  
Any changes or corrections should be sent to Linda Nakagawa.**

**And a final note, appreciation is extended to  
all who supported Dr. Kataoka's workshops this summer,  
the workshop directors and  
the area teachers who hosted the workshops!**

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**HELP WANTED:** Additional teacher(s) needed for a 40-student waiting list in Guntersville, Alabama (between Birmingham and Huntsville on Highway 79).

Contact Marche Alton, 3249 Lakeland Road, Guntersville AL 35976. Phone: (256) 582-3365.

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## **PIANO BASICS FOUNDATION**

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

June 29, 1998

West Coast Suzuki Institute

Aliso Viejo High School

Laguna Niguel, CA.

The president, Dr. Karen Hagberg, called the meeting to order. She then gave a brief overview of the current membership which consists of approximately 400 members from the U.S. and other countries. Parents and teachers were encouraged to join.

Benefits of membership were summarized as follows:

- 1) Bi-monthly newsletter with articles by Dr. Kataoka and other PBF members; dates and locations of workshops
- 2) Membership directory-organized alphabetically and by geographical location
- 3) A discography for recordings for the Suzuki Piano Books, Volumes 4 and beyond and videos which are available at a discount with no charge for postage.
- 4) \$25.00 rebates for each Kataoka Workshop attended this summer for a possible total of \$100.00.

The next **Matsumoto Ten Piano Concert** will be held on May 2, 1999.

It was announced that the first **International Piano Basics Ten Piano Concert** will be held on Aug. 6, 1999, in Sacramento, CA. Performing students will come from Japan and other countries. Each group will consist of a core of five or more students from one geographical location performing one piece. Rehearsals will begin two weeks before the concert in Sacramento. Guidelines are printed in the

May/June issue of *Piano Basics Foundation News*. This will be the first project sponsored by Piano Basics Foundation. The four previous International Piano Basics Conferences were hosted by individual area groups.

Minutes of the last meeting on July 27, 1997 were read and approved.

An election of new officers for a one-year term was held. Since no nominations had been received prior to this meeting, a slate of officers was presented from the board.

Officers presented for election for 1995-1999 were:

President - Dr. Karen Hagberg

Vice-presidents - Bruce Boiney, Joan Krzywicki, and Leah Brammer

Secretary - Cathy Williams Hargrave

Treasurer - Linda Nakagawa

A motion was made and approved by the present membership to accept these officers.

There was discussion about the possibility of Dr. Kataoka coming to the U.S for a winter workshop.

President Hagberg expressed appreciation to all who have generously donated to Piano Basics Foundation.

The meeting was adjourned.

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Please send corrections to [Kenneth Wilburn](#), web editor for **Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation News**.

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